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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 COLOMBO 000575

SIPDIS

OFFICIAL INFORMAL

DEPARTMENT FOR SA/INS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 04-03-13

TAGS: [CE](#) [MV](#) [AGMT](#) [LTTE](#)

SUBJECT: OFFICIAL INFORMAL NUMBER 52 (04-03-03)

Classified by Ambassador Wills, Reasons 1.5 (b, d)

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- SLMM RAISES NOTION OF A "THIRD FORCE"
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SRI LANKAN TEA REQUEST - URGENT

[1](#)1. (U) Colombo 561 described GSL's request that the US buy Sri Lankan tea for humanitarian aid to Iraq. The Ambassador needs to have an answer to this action request by Friday Sri Lanka time so he can get back to the requesting Ministry. We understand this isn't much time to get Washington to act on a request, but we really do need you to press the relevant offices for an answer before COB Thursday Washington time, so the Ambassador will be able to give GSL an answer on Friday our time. (ECON)

LOCAL IRAQ REACTION

[1](#)2. (C) Local reaction re Iraq remains muted. We have not heard of any anti-war demonstrations planned for Colombo or its immediate environs. We imagine that there will be something after Muslim prayers this Friday. Some sort of demonstration is being planned for Kandy. We also heard a report, which we seek to confirm, that there might be an anti-war rally in Jaffna this week. Pls see our latest cable re press coverage, which continues to be heavy.

[1](#)3. (C) By the way, per a class e-mail note from the SA Front Office sent to South Asia posts, we just want to note that we have not (repeat not) had any indication (nor heard any reports) that Sri Lankans might be leaving for Iraq to fight for the remnants of the Saddamite regime. (POL/RSO)

SLMM RAISES NOTION OF A "THIRD FORCE"

[1](#)4. (C) FYI. Recent statements by the Sri Lanka Monitoring Mission (SLMM), bizarrely, are hinting that some sort of non-LTTE, non-GSL "third force" may have been involved in instigating the recent sea confrontations off the northeast coast. In its press release re the March 20 sinking of a Chinese fishing trawler and re the March 31 attack on a SLN troop ship (see Reftels), the SLMM stated that it "cannot rule out the possibility that armed elements - not recognized by the parties" were involved. No one here in Sri Lanka knows what the SLMM may be referring to, as no one knows of any potential "armed elements" outside of the government and the LTTE. Based on our discussions with the SLMM, we think the group, in wimpy, overly diplomatic fashion, does not want to blame the LTTE directly, so they are putting up this straw man of other "armed elements." Everyone else here is calling a spade a spade. One Icelandic member of the SLMM mumbled darkly that perhaps the Indians might have been involved (we doubt that) or that an element of the Sea Tigers not under the control of the LTTE might have carried it out. (POL/DAO)

PRESIDENT THREATENS TAKEOVER OF MINISTRIES

[1](#)5. (C) FYI. President Kumaratunga has recently stated that she might take over some of the government's ministries. Her particular animus is focused on the Ministry of Civil Aviation and Ministry of Information. In attacking these ministries, Kumaratunga is accusing the director of the international airport of being connected to the LTTE (he has a bad reputation, but we're unsure of this charge) and the Information Ministry of being anti-PA. We are not sure how serious CBK is about these threats, but, based on what we are hearing, the mere mention is sparking additional cohabitation stresses. By the way, if CBK took the plunge, we are not sure of the exact mechanics of such a move, though we are sure it would wind up in the courts. (POL)

[1](#)6. (SBU) By the way, the Ambassador is slated to meet

President Kumaratunga tomorrow (April 4) at 10:30 A.M.

SECURITY ZONE ISSUE IN THE NEWS

17. (U) FYI. In response to continued criticism re the Jaffna security zone issue, the military has said it is willing to move some of its troops from hotels and other buildings in Jaffna city. In making this proposal, the military has proposed moving into the Jaffna municipal council area and other buildings near that site. While somewhat happy that the military is even discussing the matter, Tamils are urging the GSL to do more and think about getting the troops out of Jaffna city altogether. LTTE supporters, as you would guess, remain quite vociferous on this issue. The positive news on all this is that folks are discussing these issues. We expect that retired Indian General Nambiar's report on the issue, when it is out and in the press (which it is not as of yet), will stimulate further discussion. (POL)

WILLS